



# A National Emergency In Youth Mental Health

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the need for mental and behavioral health care; we must do more to ensure children have access to the full continuum of care.

## The Youth Mental Health Crisis

Mental and behavioral health concerns in children and in teens have been on the rise for many years.

- According to the [CDC](#), mental health conditions in youth are common, with 1 in 5 children and adolescents experiencing a mental health condition annually and 50% of mental illnesses beginning before age 14.
- [Data](#) shows that 50% of adolescents have a mental disorder in their lifetime, while 22% of adolescents have severe mental health impairment.
- Suicide is the [second leading cause of death](#) of youth ages 10-24 in the U.S. and rates have been rising for decades, with a 60% increase occurring between 2007 and 2018.

## Impact of COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the existing mental health crisis.

- [Studies](#) have found higher rates of anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic symptoms among children during the pandemic, especially among young people of color.
- A recent [study](#) conducted by HHS, found that between 2016 and 2020, the number of children ages 3-17 years diagnosed with anxiety grew by 29% and those with depression by 27%.
- As of July 2021, nearly [140,000 children](#) in the U.S. lost a primary caregiver to COVID-19 – with Black youth experiencing the highest rates of loss.
- According to the [CDC](#), between March and October 2020, emergency department visits for children with mental health emergencies rose by 24% (ages 5-11) and by 31% (ages 12-17).
- In June, the CDC [reported](#) a 51% rise in suspected suicide attempts among girls ages 12-17 from February 2021 to March 2021 compared to the same time period in 2019.

## An Unmet Need

Too many children are not receiving the mental and behavioral health services that they need.

- Due to a range of barriers including persistent stigma associated with mental health conditions, lacking or limited coverage for mental health treatment, and severe shortages of pediatric mental health professionals across disciplines, many children and adolescents have difficulty accessing needed mental health services and supports.
- [Approximately](#) 10% of U.S. children and adolescents aged 3–17 years received mental health services from a mental health professional in the past year, and approximately one fourth of adolescents aged 12–17 years reported receiving mental health services in the past year.
- Increased demand for inpatient pediatric mental health services has left far too many children and adolescents [boarding](#) in emergency departments awaiting placement for appropriate care.
- Currently, [only 20%](#) of children who have a mental, emotional, or behavioral health disorder receive care from a specialist. Barriers that prevent pediatricians from providing mental health care must be addressed.

## A National Emergency

- The challenges facing children and adolescents are so widespread that AAP joined the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and the Children's Hospital Association in declaring a [National Emergency in Children's Mental Health](#).
- We call on policymakers to join us in recognizing this emergency and work to improve access to and quality of care across the continuum of mental health promotion, prevention, and treatment for children and adolescents in any mental health legislative package.